

Work Header

Rating:

- [Teen And Up Audiences](#)

[Archive Warning:](#)

- [No Archive Warnings Apply](#)

Category:

- [M/M](#)

Fandom:

- [IT \(Movies - Muschietti\)](#)

Relationship:

- [Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier](#)

Characters:

- [Stanley Uris](#)
- [Patricia Blum Uris](#)
- [Beverly Marsh](#)
- [Mike Hanlon](#)
- [Bill Denbrough](#)
- [Ben Hanscom](#)

Additional Tags:

- [Eddie goes to Chicago](#)
- [Established Relationship](#)
- [The Mortifying Ordeal of Being Known and loved](#)
- [Homesickness](#)
- [Slice of Life](#)
- [Polish Eddie Kaspbrak](#)
- [Screenwriter Richie Tozier](#)
- [Alternate Universe - 1990s](#)
- [Hurt/Comfort](#)
- [the immigrant struggle](#)
- [and.... a happy ending](#)

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[← Previous Work](#) Part 3 of the [motion picture](#) series

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Summary:

There's something lonely about the place, something terribly private, and so saturated with Richie that he has the urge to run his open palms along the walls and furniture, and tell each nook and cranny not to worry, that he's going to be taken care of, now.

[Eddie, Richie and their life in Chicago. Or; an epilogue.]

Notes:

hello friends

here i am bringing you a little look into eddie's new life :)

and [here is](#) a little playlist that's mentioned later on

title from a radiohead song because i am who i am

(See the end of the work for [more notes](#).)

Work Text:

*Anyhow you had to perish Hamlet you were not for life (...)
you knew no human thing you did not know even how to breathe
— Zbigniew Herbert, Elegy of Fortinbras*

JUNE 1994

It's 4:39 AM, dark yet—though it never *gets* fully dark here, does it, not *really*, not as pitch-black and consuming—and quiet. The quietest of times.

He walks fast, hands in pockets. The air is crisp. No night birds, no crickets, just the occasional noise of the engine, someone's shout, a distant wail of an ambulance.

The garage is down the street.

They come, these nights. Twisting right into his ribcage, spaces of such sharp uncertainty, that he can't speak or do much of *anything* at all. He leaves, then, either to walk without aim, or busy himself with something—for hours, till he tires out the staticky panic in his head.

There's a sound, strange and murmuring, half-wheeze half-rattle. A creature emerges from the dark.

"Hi," Eddie says, crouching by the car in the dim light pooling inside the garage.

To call it just a *cat* seems somehow like skipping a few steps: a one-eared, yellow-eyed scarface fleabag, something properly *wrong* with its thorax, rattling like a small motor instead of purring.

"Go away," he had told it, menacingly, when it first strayed in, wet and looking more like a very big rat than anything else.

"He's cute," Richie said. "Like you."

"This is offensive," Eddie said firmly. "Little bastard knows what he's doing."

And Richie took it from there, a plethora of increasingly odd variations on the theme following: *Bastard, Battery, Baz, Barrel* to finally settle, infuriatingly, on *Barry*.

Barry lost a few worms and gained a home. Sort of.

For instance—right now—with Eddie in the garage in the half-light, trying to swallow down the feeling like something is lodged in the throat, waiting for it to let go of him.

He'll stay there to face the small hours, alone except the wan tune of the old Soviet radio he keeps on a shelf, and Barry, the creature that could be a cat.

EARLIER

When he first wakes up, that first day, he stays completely still. Eyes shut tight against the light firing up fine unfamiliar dust coiling in the air, against the soft cotton of the bedsheets. Holds his breath.

Then he breathes in, slowly: new scent of a new life, and tries not to find it choking.

I'd love someone if they let me, he used to think when he was younger, before any and all such thinking froze into a grey skein of apathy mottled inside his chest. *I don't know how. Maybe I can learn.*

Richie's apartment is spacious and tall, surprisingly *neat*, like the outer space balances the chaotic inside of his head. There are movie posters on the walls, one, particularly tall, of De Niro in *Taxi Driver*, and a gramophone with neat stacks of vinyls.

And fourteen different typewriters he keeps stashed around the apartment, varying, if you believe him, *significantly in regards to pressure and sound*.

The kitchen is a little abandoned, empty. It's easy to see Richie mostly eats out. On the fridge, a faded black and white picture of Bev and Richie as kids making faces at the camera, some scribbly scheduling note from Stan, a large magnet and a postcard saying *FLORIDA* from Mike. One of Eddie's shortest letters, his forceful handwriting explaining in detail his system of cataloguing jam, *as he'll find in the parcel*.

There's something lonely about the place, something terribly *private*, and so saturated with Richie that he has the urge to run his open palms along the walls and furniture, and tell each nook and cranny not to worry, that he's going to be taken care of, now.

He'd used to open drawers; in the years intervening between Richie bursting into Eddie's life like blinding sunlight through windows kept cinched shut for decades; and leaving his stitches pulled loose and arms outstretched to somehow chase the sudden feeling and confronted with it's frightening lack.

A silly Polish superstition, *open a drawer when you need luck*. So he would, he'd open every little drawer in his dreary little narrow apartment, before each of Richie's flights back to him, and away again.

Richie's amused voice, as he looked into the room over his shoulder. "Dude, what *happened* here?"

"Nothing," Eddie said. "I'm glad you're here."

It's all a little wonderful at first.

Everything, from the street downtown and the tall neon spelling *CHICAGO* over the theatre downtown, and the cars and the elevated railway rattling over the street, and the myriad colourful people.

With awed eyes, he walks through winter to summer.

He wants to work; the garage doesn't feel like enough, side-thing as it's always been. He's used to having his hands full. He needs it.

And he's qualified, isn't he but the quality of these qualifications seem somehow insubstantial. He tries to voice it,

"I mean, how d'you even compare," he says futilely, *frustratingly*. "There, there must be a difference in standard, I mean—you know."

"Well, I have *seen* you work," Stanley replies, no-nonsense voice and an unruffled half-lidded stare, "I'm not worried about your skills or your work ethic being insufficient. The question is, do you *want* in on this or not? It's a commitment."

And he did. He *does*.

Sometimes it just—

"Can I," he asks, inhaling. "Hang around, first? Just, to see if I could even—I mean, I don't know. Jesus, forget it. Not worth the trouble, I—"

"*Eddie*," Stan cuts in, planting a firm hand on his shoulder—he's a knack for cutting Eddie's erratic spirals short with neat precision, "*yeah*, you can. You're my friend. Take as much time as you want."

Maybe it's the word that cuts so sharp, suddenly, still unexpected—maybe it's Stan saying it, someone who's so rarely anything else than earnest.

So he nods, sharply, jaw set.

On the set, there's a green foldable chair with yellow letters spelling *EDDIE* stitched to it—Bev's idea of an welcoming invitation, which is somehow almost *overwhelming* in its targeted kindness—and a whole array of people suddenly keenly *interested* in meeting him.

Richie isn't there for the grand tour, busy doing something with Bill. Which is something of a relief, really, because Eddie doesn't want him to worry about him, and he has a ragged vicious feeling he is losing his precarious grip on reality.

Old habits die hard, humiliating as it is. *Don't look at me*.

"Sorry, I need—sorry," he blurts out at Ben, kind amiable Ben, vaguely mid-conversation with someone on the production team, Steve or something else American, who's looking at him with such hawk eyes—and leaves, abruptly.

Impulse or intuition, he ends up finding his way into Richie's trailer. He'd been there before, briefly, in his early straying days of excited wonder, to bring lunch for Richie in brown paper bags and leave him silly little notes.

Like, *WENT DOWN TO THE RIVERWALK TODAY* or *WANT TO SEE CATS AT CHICAGO THEATRE?*

And Richie would scribble back, and bring it home and put it up on the cabinet in the kitchen—like they're passing notes at school, like there is still a need for exchanging letters.

Throughout these tenuous three first years, he'd lie in bed, awake for spindly-long blue hours before morning, up so late to overcome laws of time zones. The cord of his phone stretched taut, plastic warm against his skin, on the brink of sleep, listening to Richie speak.

A line from me to you.

It's clunky and cluttered inside; more than anything else here reminiscent of the tight spaces of Warsaw's Film Institute backrooms.

Snapping the door shut behind him, he inhales—Richie's trailer smells like Richie.

Feeling stupid, so terribly goddamned *stupid*, he takes in the surroundings searching for—for something. Something.

He sets a mug in the microwave, searching the cabinet for the nice coffee he'd picked out at a roastery they went to and taught Richie to grind and prepare. Then he turns around, still restless. There's not much to cling to—his eyes fall on the closet. Fixing it with a frown, he walks up and opens it.

A few colourful shirts inside, the odd jacket. Quite unthinkingly, he pulls the sleeve of one of them to his face. Inhales.

Something stabilising.

Brows knitted together, he turns his face.

His hand clenches around the fabric, involuntary. He lowers the shirtsleeve as his eyes settle on the inside of the closet door.

Taped to the wood, a somewhat blurry pair of photos, taken in succession. One: his own face, frowning, eyes fixed somewhere off-camera. Two, just after, after Richie said something, even blurrier. Laughing.

Hidden in plain sight.

Eddie's heart gives a sharp tug. *How can you miss someone who's so close, closer than ever before.* But sometimes he feels like he separates himself so thoroughly in some desperate act of protecting the

blurring edges of identity—that he becomes untouchable. The notion is half-absurd; Richie probably put up the pictures months before Eddie’s arrival. But the continuity seems somehow cutting.

No, I’m here, Eddie thinks. I am here. I just forget I can—I can have it.

I forget you forget that I want it.

And time works in funny ways, because Richie stumbles into the trailer moments later, all his manic energy wrapped in slightly uncoordinated movement.

“Oh, *hi*,” he says, voice softening as he sees Eddie. “You’re here. I thought you—” a short moment of hesitation, barely there if you don’t know to look for it, “—left.”

And, a *repetition*, Eddie thinks, some awful pressure inside him relenting. *Roles reversed, here we go again.*

He thinks of saying something, but nothing comes out. Richie frowns as he draws closer, taking in Eddie’s lost expression.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Eddie says, and he’s surprised to find he means it. He reaches out. “Come here.”

He takes the job.

Frank’s got a tremor in his hands.

From the shipyard machinery, probably—or from something else. He smells of something Eddie associates vaguely with the parcels. He’s got grey hair, a beard, and haunted eyes as dark as Eddie’s, which pin the opponent down without mercy, and a broken-up smoker’s with a weird nowhere accent lilting as he switches between Polish and English without warning.

Frank says, “Glad you visited, son. I was wondering.”

Richie responds with something easy and conversational.

An ugly emotion, fear.

And Eddie is terrified.

They sit in the car. It’s dark except for the wan lamplight outside, and it’s *raining*, thick droplets trickling down the front window, pushed apart by the rhythmic movement of the wipers. He breathes through his nose, eyes fixed unseeingly on the dashboard, with a growing pressure on his vocal cords.

I'm a coward. He can't lift his hands to the steering wheel, his arms feel weak and futile. They sit in silence.

There's a small shuffling noise. Eddie presses his eyes shut.

Richie's hand touches his wrist. It twitches on the steering wheel, an involuntary response. But Richie isn't deterred, fingers tracing the curve of his wrist-bone, then wrapping around it, thumb at the pulse-point.

"Hey," Richie says.

"I don't know what I thought."

"You thought it would be cool to visit your dad," Richie says quietly. "It's also cool if it wasn't."

Eddie bites down at the inside of his cheek, jaw tightening. His vision is blurring a little, unfocused.

"All my life I wanted a father but I don't want this now," he manages, in a violent rush, and it sounds childish even to him. His voice is all wrong, stilted and harsh in all the wrong places, the accent coming through. "I don't—fuck."

Running a nervous hand across his face, he says, muffled, "I'm a coward."

"Dude," Richie mutters. "You're like the bravest person I know. You can try again, if you want. But you don't owe him shit."

He mulls it over, still rigid.

"I'm gonna end up like this, aren't I," he says at length.

"Mm," Richie says. "Yeah. I'll trade you for the younger model. Your Ziggy Stardust cousin."

Eddie snorts. He puts the key in ignition, feeling returning to his hands.

Says, "No you won't."

He learns Richie like a confusing language.

His friends, for a start, who become Eddie's friends, though it's learning curve, too, to accept it. Learning *ellipse*, maybe—takes longer to arrive at the end point than expected, the way roundabout.

The fact is, none of them believed he'd stick around for Richie, let alone throw out his life and move whole continents. For various reasons: Richie's searingly luckless history of love life, for one. Everything about Eddie, for other.

Eddie understood that.

It's just—

"To be told, over and over, you can't do it," he tells Bev, once. It's easy to be friends with Bev. "Not because it's not. Doable. Because *you're* not able to, because, I don't know, because there's something wrong with you, or simply," he trails off.

Not enough of you left.

It's Bev's idea, as most things that rival Richie's flair for the absurd are. Starts with a throwaway remark about *someone who didn't make it to something in time*, and needing a favour, and, yes, something pretty nondescript about denim. Eddie has muttered—bent over the trunk of a 1988 Chevrolet Corvette, easily one of the *prettiest* cars he'd seen, with a spanner between his teeth—that *sure*, yeah, he'd help.

"Bev, Jesus Christ."

"C'mon," Bev says. "You look amazing."

"I look—"

Fucking surreal, he thinks, glaring at the tall mirror, and nearly biting through the toothpick.

Light blue Levi's 501s, good quality denim, fitting very snug; light blue denim jacket with a little American flag on the sleeve over a white tank top; a pair of round black little Ray Bans, and a ... fairly *insulting* amount of hair gel.

"—hot," Bev says, with a shit-eating grin.

"Like a caricature," Eddie says sourly.

"That's the joke!" Bev says, which is exactly what Richie would say. "C'mon, just *one* shoot."

"Jesus *Christ*," he repeats.

But he goes with it anyway, striding down the street to the studio alongside Bev in her pink jumpsuit, and he even does a little bit of a John Wayne as he strolls up to the red convertible and swings himself inside—hips, and all that jazz.

And it's a win anyway to see Richie burst out laughing in that very particular way, softer and more erratic at once, as he pulls down the shades and winks at him from behind the steering wheel.

Eddie says, "*Hasta la vista, baby.*"

“I love the way you look at him,” comes Bev’s voice, a little mumbled. Eddie twitches, looking to his side. She’s got her legs up on the table, and a beer bottle in hand. She’s frecklier than usually after a shoot down South.

“Huh?” Eddie says, hazy.

He traces her eyes back across the room, along his previous line of sight, where Richie is dancing with Stan to some atrocious song.

Bev takes a swig of her beer and picks up, fondly, “Like you’re trying to fight gravity. Turn it around. You know?”

Eddie blinks, thoughts too slow to follow properly. “No,” he says, earnest. “What’s that *mean*?”

Bev shrugs, and then snickers, “I don’t know.”

They end up splitting off from the rest of the group, going to get drinks somewhere downtown just the two of them, because,

“This’nt even all that *strong*, y’know,” Eddie announced, which wasn’t strictly true, but Richie had said something provocatively annoying about *showing him a good slavic time, baby*, and—

And now here they are, middle of the fucking night, Eddie stumbling to a clumsy halt and blinking with bleary eyes after Richie who is—

Standing in the middle of the wide road, arms outstretched in the air, shouting, hoarsely, something that sounds like *I’m the king of the world*—which he isn’t, and he’s much too loud and Eddie desperately doesn’t want to get arrested, but—fuck, he might as well be.

He’s drunk, too, and he’s almost forty-one now, and he hasn’t felt this young in a while.

He takes off *running*, down the street, straight to him.

So, no one really believed he’d do it. It took him a while to understand *Richie* didn’t, either.

Difference is, Eddie thinks, *for once in my life, I did. I believed I could do it.*

World of fucking difference.

They stumble back to the apartment, elliptic and out of sync, shoulders and legs colliding with one another.

“I love you,” Richie is saying, slurred, slumped against the door as Eddie fumbles with the keys. “You know? I love you so much.”

Both arms around Richie, he tugs him inside.

He learns.

Things like, for instance, the ways in which Richie grows loud and quietens, how it takes a while for him to say things directly instead of talk circles around them, and *why*. And versions of him: *Richie, American screenwriter. Richie from Derry, Maine.*

Things like violent nightmares that wrench him from sleep at night and banish him to the little kitchen, pale and huddled by the open window in the wan sheen of the city outside.

So Eddie gets up, and goes after him, and sits at the table drinking coffee until it’s bright enough.

Richie. Eddie’s Richie.

It’s a fickle feeling, creeping up irrational at the oddest times; homesickness.

He thinks, *I fucking hated that place*. And stops, disarmed momentarily by something as stupid as—

The way refracted light down in the port stirs some spatial-physical memory. And then the sharp tug of missing something vague, the inevitable look on his face Richie will notice. *But I wanted to leave so badly.*

“Homesick, eh?” Richie asks, nudging an elbow into his side, with maybe a little more edge than usually, little more roughness.

Eddie stares ahead, unsettled. This isn’t something he’d expected.

“Kind of?” he says, unsure. “I don’t know.”

“You can go home,” Richie tells him then, loud, a little *too* fast. It’s not quite biting anymore, and if Eddie cared to listen, it’d sound a little like bravado. “If you want to. Visa’s good both ways. So you *can* go home.”

“Yeah,” Eddie mutters, inconsequential, not thinking to look at Richie’s expression at all, in the moment too wrapped in his own unease.

I can't, he thought, there's no one such thing.

There's trains in Chicago.

He *likes* trains. And sometimes, he likes taking one to the studio instead of his car. Likes watching other people, everyone from somewhere and everyone aiming somewhere else, vibrantly different and still so anonymous.

First frost comes early in '92, early morning of late November. At 7 AM, Eddie sits, huddled in between the passengers of the L, in his sheepskin jacket that Richie insisted he keeps because it gave him a vibe of,

“Clint Eastwood in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.”

Which, “No,” Eddie had said, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Not *at all*.”

But he did keep it.

And he's reading a science-fiction novel, a well-loved paperback Mike lent him, and listening to a song through the headphones of the Walkman Richie sent him, whole two years before he even got his Visa, in a parcel along with a mixtape labelled with a black sharpie, *EDDIE'S JAM*.

Dolores sings, *Oh, my life, is changing everyday, every possible—*

When Eddie gets off the train, it's snowing.

There's a sharp knock on the door.

“*Chwile*,” Eddie mutters, drawing himself up from where he's slouched against the side of the ornate bathtub, in the immense immaculate bathroom. Noise is spilling in from the outside, stymied sounds of chatter and music, and the light seems too jarring for open eyes.

Fuck, he thinks.

The collar of his dress shirt digging into his chin. His head is spinning—he's not quite *drunk*, but approaching it, warm and disoriented in the most uncomfortable way. Sitting up, one knee drawn up the other leg stretched across the floor, he cradles the bottle of straight vodka he'd taken from one of the tables.

The knocking repeats. “*Kurwa*,” Eddie grits out.

He staggers to his feet, raising himself up on the sink.

His eyes catch on the mirror: a narrow, drawn face, eyes sullen under the hair falling over the forehead, even older and coarser and less inviting now than it's ever been.

Inhaling slowly, he pushes himself off the sink and leaves.

It's icy-cold out the balcony, frost biting viciously at the flushed skin of his cheeks and shaking hands as he fishes out a cigarette. He lights it, sniffing, and leans back against the wall.

He doesn't smoke anymore. But he *does*.

New Year's '92; and over the railing of the rooftop terrace, Los Angeles lies spread in a myriad punctured lights. It's the most formal event he's ever had the chance to attend; a wrap party for a movie Stan's been going grey over for a year.

It's *agony*, or something like that. Bearable at first, he soon feels jarringly out of place, laid out for scrutiny armed with nothing, sweating in his rented tux more expensive than his old car by a mile. Standing rigid and distant, incapable of forcing out two words without thinking obsessively about the wrong sound of them.

And he'd stick to Richie or Mike or Stan, but they're all off networking at the last thing he wants—the *last* thing—to occupy even more space, to draw even more attention and pull it from Richie who's—

Who's a presence, a *persona*, here, and it is both *good* to see him so full of himself for once—cocksure and towering over the room with a witty string of loud, sharp irony—and so unsettling, to see soft edges sharp, watch him once again from the shadows like a stranger.

Bill's maybe more used to such things, better suited to handle them, with Mike's charming smile plastered over posters of men's cologne. But Bill's not quite *no one* himself, and Eddie—Eddie doesn't think he's got nerves enough for it. *A nobody from nowhere*, he thinks, and wasn't it always like that anyway? He'd hardly been a people person, even back home.

Then again, Bill doesn't *love* leaving the house.

Feeling choked, he tugs at the tie, pulling it loose. Stiff fabric and sweat and alcohol, and *I made it*, he thinks dimly, the city lights blurring in the distance.

Richie sent him a postcard the winter after he flew away, *Greetings from Chicago* over the Pulaski skyline at night, and Eddie had pinned it to the wall of his stark empty apartment, right after he left Maria for good, thinking what he'd give to see it *just once*.

He has a clear memory of Patty, pushed up into the corner of the sofa underneath the postcard, bony knees crossed one over another in the austere room, wrapped in her soft screen of smoke like a shawl.

She'd looked at him, restless with nerves in the new space, trying to set up the phone unit, and said,

"I'm proud of you."

And Eddie had scoffed at that, thinking erratically of all that could go wrong and all that was left begin yet—but he'd remembered it.

The sound of it, the way it felt to hear it.

Well, I made it.

There's a noise, glass doors to the terrace swinging open, and—there he *is*. Stumbling out into the biting cold, tall and graceless as ever, eyes zeroing on Eddie in something like relief.

"There you are," Richie says, drawing closer, "Been looking for you."

"Needed a smoke," Eddie says quietly.

He blinks, eyes dropping from Richie's clean shaven face and neatly coiffed hair and fixating somewhere by his crooked undone bowtie.

"Sorry," he adds, voice harsh and futile. "I didn't mean to—hide away here like this, it's fucking—*stupid*. Your coworkers are having a fucking field trip with psychoanalysis for sure."

"Ah, *fuck* them," Richie says dismissively, leaning on the wall next to Eddie and taking the cigarette from his hand. He flicks it to the ground instead of raising to his face and snuffs with the sole of his dress shoe. His voice has softened from earlier, but he sounds *tired* now, in that way that makes him almost grim. "Bunch of fucking hypocrites. We should've stayed in Chicago with Billy."

Wind picks up over the city, piercing cold. Eddie looks up at him, face drawn.

But Richie isn't looking at him anymore. His eyes are a little glazed, a little reddened, and fixed on the lights ahead. The memory hits sharp and searing: *a carious bench and grey concrete with grey rain, and—*

"The American dream, baby," Richie says bitterly. Then he says, "Sorry."

Eddie blinks. Some terrible thing, twisted up inside him, relents.

"Hey," he says, quietly, and waits till Richie looks down to meet his gaze. "Thank you."

Richie frowns a little. "For what?"

And Eddie says, "Best year of my life."

There's a moment of silence. Cold wind picking at strands of his hair, Richie looks—startled. Thrown off balance, blue eyes searching Eddie's face for signs of something other than honesty. But he comes up short.

“... Me too,” he says at last, hoarse and small, a little nonsensical.

But Eddie gets it, anyway.

Richie is wearing a suit, too, proper and expensive, with a white dress shirt creasing where the top buttons have been tugged undone. Eddie runs his hands over the creases, smoothing them out one by one, and Richie shivers under his touch. Perhaps from the cold. It's starting to snow, now.

“I wanna—” Eddie says, barely audible.

“Yeah?”

When he looks up, Richie is wearing that look on his face, like he's already saying yes, *will* say yes no matter what Eddie asks of him, no matter how many times.

His fingers bunch up in the starched fabric as he pulls Richie closer, the snow picking at the skin in small bites.

He says, “Take me home.”

Home.

Richie treats the concept like a time-bomb; playing a strange game of chicken where he picks at the subject, coaxes it to come up and then promptly shuts down and skitters around it, as though scared his own words will turn against him.

He is scared, Eddie realises, in the latest of his however many epiphanies, mid-forming a dumpling.

He's sitting astride on a stool by the window in the kitchen. Wearing one of Richie's worst T-shirts, faded white with a red *Wienerschnitzel* logo, which he *hates* but which is soft from years of laundry; check-print boxers and too-big white socks hiked up his calves.

It's hot outside, sunlight spilling warm and drowsy into the little room. The compact TV installed on the counter buzzes out weekend *ER* reruns. The memory of each odd conversation unwinds in Eddie's head like a tape recording, parallel to other trains of thought.

Conclusion to hypothesis: Richie doubts Eddie the way one would fear a migratory bird, skittish, easy to scare off—but mostly, due a return course. And sometimes, at his most uncertain, he'd try to scare it off on purpose—cut the cord, rip off the bandaid—then lurch desperately after it, as if to hold it back.

Which is ridiculous, Eddie thinks, blinking, tearing his eyes from the open window.

On screen, George Clooney says something about a “*coarctation of the aorta*.”

“That’s not a thing,” Eddie gripes, wincing at the uneven pattern of his dumpling.

There’s a soft noise from the living room; Richie snorts.

“You arguing with Michael Crichton again, baby?” he calls out. “I’ll pass your remarks.”

“Don’t you dare,” Eddie tells him. Then he says, “It’s unrealistic.”

Richie snickers again, softer. Not half-a-minute later, there’s a dull noise.

“... Fell from the couch.”

“Okay,” Eddie says, wiping his hands on his boxers and getting up for the roller to reach for the last batch of dough.

“I’m fine though.”

“*Okay.*”

Richie sighs deeply, already half-distracted. “You’re so mean to me.”

The TV show fizzles out into end credits. *Ridiculous*, Eddie thinks, flattening the dough evenly with the roller.

He’s never been more convinced of something in his life.

The learning of a language comes with learning to speak it.

“You’re coming with.”

“Huh?” Richie says, fuzzily. He’s sprawled on the carpet still, in his old grey sweatpants tucked into socks and a matching idiotic T-shirt saying *You bet I’m IRISH !* which Eddie *hates*.

He wipes his dough-white hands on a handcloth as he walks across the carpet.

“You’re coming with me,” he repeats a little more intently, drawing to a halt once he’s stood directly above Richie.

Richie blinks up at him, eyes bleary from that faraway space he strays into while writing, and lowers his scribbled-over script to his chest. He’s got ink on the side of his mouth where he’s been chewing on a pen, a blue splotch at the very corner. His hair sticks up at a funny angle.

“If I do go home,” Eddie repeats, frowning down at him, “you’re coming with me.”

Something in Richie’s expression shutters, tenses and relaxes at once, shifting through an array of responses.

Eddie lowers himself to his knees, then, one then another, and then leans down, bracing his arms on both sides of Richie’s head.

The tips of their noses almost touch. Richie keeps blinking a little fast.

“I don’t *want* to go without you,” Eddie says, feeling Richie’s ribcage expand and contract. “You idiot.”

Richie blinks again.

Then he smiles, though it’s a little hard to catch when he kisses him.

“Okay,” he says.

He seems to breathe out after that.

And, well, there’s these discoveries, too, which maybe shouldn’t be that surprising. He likes being *touched*, Eddie learns.

He wakes up too early, the light getting in through the window wan and gauzy. Bleary, hardly aware of proper directions, he turns over in bed. Reaches, hands searching. He draws his nose against Richie’s stubbly cheek. Hooks a leg around his, presses his face into the side of his neck.

Richie makes a soft sound, incoherent, and then wraps himself around Eddie, turning them over so he’s got him pinned down, whole-weight lying chest to chest, Eddie’s ankle hooking around his calf once again, tangling them together.

Eddie thinks, *there you are. Kochanie.*

Spring of '92, Patty comes to America.

As usually, the welcome dinner’s at Mike and Bill’s, easily the nicest of their apartments.

Patty falls into place faster and better than Eddie could ever hope for, he thinks, because Patty *feels* in place wherever she goes. So she walks in, in her big coat and round glasses with a little dish of *knysze* she baked and brought in her suitcase, and thrusts it into the bewildered hands of a somewhat flustered Stan with a mirthful, “*Hello, stranger.*”

They walk down to the docks.

Patty—tall and somewhat hypnotic, with her head thrown back, her wild hair a caustic little smile.

“So,” Eddie asks, at last, “do you like it?”

And he means: *him, do you like him, and all of them, and our apartment, and Bill’s two hundred potted plants at his and Mike’s place, and the bookshop down my street, and Bev and Richie’s habit of*

finishing each other's insane anecdotes, the garage cat and Stanley's incomprehensible avian humour you seemed to find so funny at dinner. Did you like the dinner.

Patty turns her head to him, a big smile.

She says, "I like it so *much*."

And later, he understands what is happening before it's spoken aloud, wandering into the rehearsal room *en route* somewhere else. From the doorway he sees, as if caught on camera: Patty's head tilting, as if pulled by a law of inevitable motion, to fall on Stan's shoulder.

The pointy tip of her shoe kicks lightly at his calf.

He turned his head towards her; Eddie turned away.

JUNE 1994

Dawn comes searing; early morning light thready and intrusive, bland yet and void of proper colour. He's reluctant to face the day, wary of it. In light, everything feels so much. Blinking—eyes raw and irritated after hours without sleep, head pulsing dully sans caffeine—and inhaling very consciously, he looks down.

The city starts to wake in small increments, buzzing discordantly: stop lights blinking to light, someone across the street opening the window.

He was supposed to pick Patty up from the airport later today, but somewhere along the way *Stan* came along—and deftly, quietly manoeuvred the task out of Eddie's hands.

Or maybe Patty simply handed it to him like she handed Eddie that orange years ago.

Funny how things work.

He flexes his right hand, lying idle in his lap—it's stained with motor oil just as the rest. Unclenching the fingers, he thinks, *toothpaste is good for cleaning precious metal*.

He sees Richie walking down the street before Richie thinks to look up to the garage roof.

Tall, in a flannel borrowed probably from Mike, he strides down the street, one hand stuck in his pocket, the other cradling what looks like takeout to his chest. *Where did you find it at this hour*, Eddie thinks, scratching the patchy fur behind Barry's ear where he lies plastered to his leg.

And soon enough, Richie looks up.

He's got bags under his eyes, and he's in dire need of a shave. Legs dangling from the roof, left one kicking up and down, Eddie leans forward on his forearms. And smiles.

For a moment they look at each other.

"Well, jolly, top of the morning, Mr. Chimneysweep!" Richie says at last, obnoxiously loud. Barry flinches, ears pricking back, and Eddie sighs,

"Come up here."

First thing he does is hand Eddie a coffee in a disposable cup with the Starbucks logo on it. The cup burns his hands, as if reminding the nerve endings to feel. He burns his tongue, too, as he takes a sip, and blinks as his eyes water. It's very sweet and quite *awful* and he can taste something vaguely plastic in it.

"Thought you might need it," Richie says, and Eddie wouldn't give a shit if the coffee tasted like cardboard.

Richie is eating an apple; the paper bag turns out to be full of them. There's always apples at Bill and Mike's, brought in crates from the farm weekly while in season and stacked haphazardly around the apartment. Eddie's volunteered to help pick them more than once.

Squinting asymmetrically, Richie muses, "Have you slept?"

"Have *you*?" Eddie shoots back at him.

Richie smiles against his kernel, then tosses it over the edge of the roof. Then he tilts sideways, whole-body, head falling into Eddie's lap.

He squints up at him again.

"No," he mutters, "had a pot of coffee and listened to Bill come up with the plot of *Blade Runner* for the first time all over again on his very own."

"Christ," Eddie says, reaching up to run his gritty fingers through Richie's hair—it's greying at the temples, the scruff on his cheeks. With two fingers, he pushes up his glasses to the forehead. Richie smiles.

Barry slaps the coffee cup with the end of his agitated tail, nearly tilting it over. Eddie catches it seconds before it falls to the street.

"Aw," Richie says, delighted, twisting his neck, "*Baz*. He's been sleeping here with you? You're buddies now? My two favourite—"

"Strays?" Eddie mutters, raising the cup to his mouth.

Then he says, "You know how to pick them, huh."

Richie blinks at that, and raises himself back up to sitting position. Irises strikingly light blue in the morning light, his eyes strain to focus on Eddie. He always looks a little lost without glasses. Reaching over, Eddie tugs them back down.

Richie swallows. "What're you thinking of, when you get up here?"

It comes out oddly quiet.

Eddie inhales slowly, shrugging one shoulder. The lady across the street is looking directly at him, so he raises the coffee cup in toast.

Says, "Not much."

But it's a lot. A strange sort of thinking. Frayed, circular. His knee twitches. *Difficult to put a finger on.*

He looks down at his once-white *NIKE* sneakers, dirty and oil-stained three years down the line, worn, soles starting to fray apart from the sides.

"You walk angry," Bev's told him, and Eddie kept thinking about it for days.

He refuses to buy new ones. He can. And Richie tells him, all the time, I'll buy you new ones. But he doesn't let him.

And suddenly he thinks, maybe it needs saying, maybe that's *all* it needs in order to go away properly or become somehow understandable.

So he begins, "Sometimes I still get so—"

Richie's voice is quiet. "Trapped?"

Eddie smiles, shaking his head. The old woman is gone, and there's no one on the opposite side of the street except a battered pigeon.

"No, far from it. Opposite of it," he says, tensely. His hands are shaking, and so are his knees, up and down, a twitchy pattern. From the coffee and sugar rush, maybe, from lack of sleep. "Lost. There's so much of everything. And I'm only ... only ..."

The word doesn't come.

Richie is quiet. He lays back, stretching, long legs dangling from the edge next to Eddie's.

Eddie inhales. "Do you know what today is?"

"Wednesday," Richie says vaguely.

"No, it's not," Eddie counters, squinting across the street. The pigeon is gone. "And that's not what I mean. Today I *met* you."

"Oh."

And *that's* very quiet.

Then, "It's been a while, huh," Richie says. "That got you in a mood?"

“Kind of,” Eddie says. He lets another moment of unsettled silence crawl between them, then inhales sharply.

“When you met me. What did you think?”

There’s a beat.

“That you have the saddest eyes I’ve ever fucking seen,” Richie mutters, at length. “Then I thought I want you to ditch everything and marry me or something. The timespan between these two is too embarrassing to say in front of god.”

Eddie smiles, but it dies away quickly. When he speaks again, he feels the words come to him as if from a great distance, each plucked from somewhere almost unrealised.

“I wanted you—I wanted you to see me,” he says. “And I wanted you to *like* me—“

“I *did* like you.”

“—and I wanted. To be enough. For that,” Eddie says, a little harshly, concise as he can to get it out.

There’s a moment of hollow silence.

“You *were*,” Richie says, quietly. “Eddie, if anything—”

But Eddie shakes his head, interrupting. His eyes fall shut.

“I had this ... capacity,” he says, starkly quiet. “For, I don’t know. For something. Something more. And still I couldn’t—”

It’s so quiet.

“Justify it,” he says, at last, words rushed and stilted. “Justify wanting it, I mean, fuck. I had a life. Didn’t I? It was a life.”

He goes on, shakily, “I was alive, I had a place to live and a decent job, and so much more than so many people ever even fucking get, and yet I just didn’t. Didn’t fucking feel like I was *breathing*. You know?”

His eyes are prickling, something hot but instead of wiping at them, he smiles.

There’s a beat. “You do now?”

You breathe alright now.

And Eddie smiles wider. He turns his head.

Through his unslept tired eyes, he looks at Richie: squinting at him in his glasses, rumpled and shabbier than he should be, strands of grey in his hair and beard.

I learned, Eddie thinks.

“Yeah, Rich,” he says. “I do.”

Richie blinks, a little thrown.

Sometimes he still gets like this—like he’s caught so off-guard by Eddie’s affection it brings him to a halt; like he doesn’t quite know what to do with the intensity of it, how to retain it.

Like they’re in that old summer house again, and Richie is playing a wistful song and Eddie is reaching for him when neither of them believed he would, scaring them both.

But Eddie is better at speaking the language now. Fluent, maybe. So instead of stilling too, he leans in.

Richie’s hands—warm, as they find the both sides of his cold face. And he tastes vaguely like an apple, and Eddie probably tastes like very bad coffee.

Good morning, Eddie thinks. You remind me how to feel awake.

When he leans away, Richie lets out a small sigh that turns into a giant yawn, rubbing at his left eye under the glasses.

“Wanna go home?” he says, vaguely.

“I am home,” Eddie says.

Notes:

two little notes

1. thank you so, so much for the response to cv. it means such an awful lot i can't even put it in words
2. thanks to my friends for encouraging me to write it and giving it a look before i posted it.
i love u all ♥

i hope you enjoyed this!! you can find me on twitter @ lvslies

Series this work belongs to:

- [← Previous Work](#) Part 3 of the [motion picture](#) series